Of all the people I have known, the hundreds and hundreds of people I have known in public life, she has the best combination of brains and heart and consistent dedication and the ability to get things done of any person I have ever known, anywhere in public life. She will be a worthy successor to Senator Moynihan, Senator Kennedy, and a great partner for Chuck Schumer.

Come on up, Hillary, and give them a speech. Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:36 p.m. at the Hudson Theatre. In his remarks, he referred to reception host Susie Tompkins Buell; Jeffrey Katzenberg, founder, Dreamworks SKG Studios; Amy Rao, president, Integrated Archive; Harvey Weinstein, president, Miramax Films; entertainers Elton John and Stevie Wonder; Prime Minister Tony Blair of the United Kingdom; Dorothy Rodham, the President's mother-in-law; Charlton Heston, president, National Rifle Association; and former President Slobodan Milosevic of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro). A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

Interview With Chris Bull of the Advocate
September 27, 2000

Hate Crimes Legislation

Mr. Bull. Thank you for agreeing to this interview. I thought we'd jump ahead in the questions a little bit, because I noticed this morning at the press briefing you talked about the hate crimes legislation and opposition to including sexual orientation in it.

There was the front page of the Washington Post today, a man walks into a gay bar in Virginia and starts shooting. With all the evidence about this particular aspect of hate crimes, why is there still so much opposition in Congress?

The President. First, let's talk about the good news here. There's 57 votes for it in the Senate and about 240 votes for it in the House. Virtually all the Democrats, but four or five of them, are for it. And we've got 41 Republicans on a motion to instruct the conferees to leave it in the defense bill. So there's no question that we now have a majority for it.

How would it not be included in? The leadership of the Congress and the leadership of the Republican Party is still well to the right of the country on this issue. Same thing in Texas, you know, they could have had a hate crimes bill after James Byrd was killed, if Governor Bush had just lifted a finger for it. But he was unwilling to take on the rightwing in his own party, and so it died.

And it's the same thing in Washington. If the leaders of the House and the Senate can be persuaded to instruct their conferees to follow the will of the majority, it will prevail. If it doesn't prevail, it's because the leadership of the Congress and the leadership of the Republicans is still to the right of the country on the issue.

Matthew Shepard

Mr. Bull. As you may remember, the murder of Matthew Shepard, the student in Wyoming——

The President. I remember it vividly.

Mr. Bull. ——really changed the way Americans see hate crimes against gay people. What was your initial reaction to that murder?

The President. Well, I think it was particularly horrifying and heartbreaking because he was so young and so small and the way they killed him was so graphic. But it did galvanize the country. You know, the American people are fundamentally decent. But like human beings everywhere, since the dawn of time, they're afraid of something that's profoundly different from the life they know and the experiences they've had.

Usually, the way civilization progresses is something happens that forces people to see things in a different way, in a more human way. And that's what Matthew Shepard's death did. I think the fact that his parents, who are obviously not leftwing activists, just mainstream, hardworking Americans, became advocates for the hate crimes legislation and the fact that that

police commissioner there, O'Malley, was so eloquent in saying that the experience of dealing with Matthew's death and dealing with his family and his friends had changed his life, as well as his attitudes.

I think those three people deserve an enormous amount of credit for the way the country has moved.

Mr. Bull. With the depth of the problem that you've just described, people's psychological response to difference, is hate crimes legislation really the best way to deal with the problem? Does it really get at the roots of it?

The President. Well, I think it's just one piece of it. I think it's really important to pass ENDA, and there are big majorities for ENDA in the country, too. And it hasn't passed for the same reason.

The other thing I think that's important—and ENDA would really feed into this—is that we just need people, all the American people, to have the opportunity to interact on a human level, in the workplace, in social settings, with gays and lesbians and know that they're interacting with them. Personal contact, it may sound old-fashioned and naive—it's not a substitute for laws—but it will change attitudes.

I'll never forget in the administration's early debate over gays in the military, there was a national poll published which showed that Americans, who knew a gay person and knew they knew a gay person, were 2-1 in favor of changing the policy. So if you believe that most people have goodness in them and will, other things being equal, treat their fellow human beings in a decent and fair way, then you have to overcome ignorance and fear. And it takes time, and it takes contact.

President's Background on Gay Rights

Mr. Bull. One of the things for which your administration will be remembered is, early on, you talked a lot about gay people in a way that Americans hadn't heard from that level of government, which is in terms of tolerance, inclusiveness, a place at the table, having no one to waste. How did you come across that approach to including gay people in, sort of, the rhetoric of the civil rights movement?

The President. Personal contact. In 1977, when I was attorney general, there was an attempt to make—we had just adopted a new criminal code, and the criminal code had gotten rid of all the status offenses, including homosexuality. I imagine those old laws are still on the books in some States.

And one of our legislators went home, and he lived in a very conservative district, and he was roundly abused by the religious right at the time. And that's just when they were getting up and going there, in the midseventies. So he came back and introduced a bill, essentially, to make homosexuality a crime again but turning it from a status offense into an act. And I tried to kill it then. It just struck me as wrong.

And I remember, it was the first thing that sort of, I don't know, brought me to the attention of some of the gay community in my home State. It was never a big issue. And I failed. I thought I had it done, and I failed. Literally in the last 30 minutes of the last day of the legislative session, they voted it out. And we knew we had to kill it in committee because the legislators would be afraid to vote against it back then.

I knew from the time I was a boy growing up that I knew people who were gay, even though they didn't talk about it. So I always felt that. And then when I started running for President and people who were active in the gay rights cause started to talk to me—starting with David Mixner, who had been a friend of mine for, by then, way over 20 years—I just decided that it was one thing I was going to try to make a difference in. And I started actively seeking out members of the gay community. Marty Rouse helped me a lot in New York, took me to a big meeting there I never will forget.

I know it seems sort of—it probably seems strange to everybody. I was running on a New Democratic platform. I was a Governor of a southern State, and on issues like fiscal responsibility and some foreign policy issues I was, I suppose, to the right of where most activist Democrats were. But it just struck me as a human rights issue from the beginning, and a personal issue.

Future of Gay Rights

Mr. Bull. Having set that tone in the White House, is there—how do we maintain it after you're in office? How do we make sure it doesn't go back to pitting groups against one another?

The President. Well, first of all, I think that it will never be quite the same. I think we have to give—you can't give me too much credit

and give the gay community too little, or give the American people too little credit. I mean, I don't think it will ever be fashionable for people in national life to demonize gays again.

But I think the extent to which we continue to progress will depend entirely on who's elected. Al Gore is for the hate crimes legislation and the "Employment Non-Discrimination Act" and has been at least as open, if not more open, than me in pursuing this cause. This is something that he really, really feels strongly about.

And I don't believe Governor Bush is a bad person, with a bad heart. I think he basically has a good heart. But I think that—you know, he passed on the hate crimes bill in Texas, and I don't think he'll be for the "Employment Non-Discrimination Act." And if he wins and he keeps his majority in Congress, I just don't think we'll get very far, legislatively. And there won't be nearly as many appointments, and I don't think the approach to AIDS, both at home and abroad, will be nearly as aggressive.

Legislative Agenda/Gays in the Military

Mr. Bull. With all your success in setting a different tone on the gay rights debate, the legislative and policy-related areas have been more challenging. How do you think—I mean, what needs to be done to actually make concrete legislative gains in terms of the military policy, et cetera?

The President. Well, I think two things. I think, first of all, on the concrete legislative gains, I think the most important thing is to change the composition of Congress. It doesn't have to change a lot—you know, 10 or 12 seats in the House, even if the Democrats didn't win a majority in the Senate—if we picked up three or four seats, so that it was effectively a split, I think it would change the landscape dramatically.

So I think if you had a President who was committed and some changes in the Congress, even modest changes, I think it would make a huge difference on the legislative front.

On the gays in the military issue, I think it's important to remember——

Mr. Bull. That was a case I'm sure a lot of Democrats who opposed an initiative——

The President. Oh, we got killed. I think a lot of people forget—and I don't want to be too defensive about this—but a lot of people forget that I did not accept General Powell's proposed compromise until the Senate had voted 68-32 in a resolution against my position. The House, we knew there were over 300 votes against us, so we knew they had a veto-proof majority. But we thought we might be able to sustain a veto of an attempt to ratify the old policy, until the Senate voted 68-32 against it. So that meant they had a veto-proof majority in both Houses.

So my guess is that what the next move should be is to try to get the Congress to restore to the military and the executive branch discretion to make this decision and then to try to explore—because I think there have been some changes in attitudes to the military, too—whether there is—you know, what kind of steps could be taken from there.

I don't think that the Congress would be willing to legislatively reverse it and adopt the policy that I favor. But they might be willing to give the policy back to the executive branch and to the military on the condition that the President pledge to kind of work through this thing with the military. And I do believe there has been some progress there. There's still a lot of resistance, too, as you know, but I think there has been some progress.

Mr. Bull. You were pilloried on both sides of that issue in '93.

The President. The worst of all worlds, everybody was mad at me.

Mr. Bull. Because you had your friend David Mixner—was protesting. And you said at the time that you had spilt a lot of blood on the issue. What did you mean by that?

The President. Well, just that. I mean, I cared a lot about it. I thought I was right. I didn't agree to compromise until I was beat. One of the things I learned the first 2 years is that—I don't think it was apparent to 90 percent of the people in the gay community who cared about this that we were beat. That is, I don't think that we made enough of the Senate vote, and maybe what I should have done, if I just was concerned about my own standing and clarity, is just let them pass it and veto it. Then they'd override the veto. We'd be back where we were.

But the way they implemented the changes that we announced in the first few years were just about as bad as it was before. Now, it's gotten a little better now. Bill Cohen has gotten on it and changed a lot of the training. There is no question that as a practical matter, even

though it's unsatisfying as a matter of principle, that if the policy as I announced it or implemented it, it would be better than the policy before. But for years there was a lot of resistance to that.

I think it is going to get better now if the next Secretary of Defense hews to the line that Secretary Cohen has set out.

Gay Community Leadership

Mr. Bull. The gay rights movement I think eventually came to see that it, itself, had failed to provide you a certain amount of political cover to create the conditions in America in which people supported such a change. You've experienced gay rights leaders for a long time now. How do you think it could become a more effective, mainstream political force in the long run?

The President. Well, first of all, I don't think that they failed any more than I did. Look, I fight a lot of fights I don't win. The NRA beats me more than I beat them in Congress. The insurance companies beat me on health care, and so far, they're beating us on the Patients' Bill of Rights. The drug companies, so far, are beating us on adding a Medicare drug benefit.

So it shouldn't be surprising or, I would argue, discouraging that the first time you come out of the box on some of these issues you don't win. America has always been, like all societies, a place where organized, entrenched interests initially have more power than even popular causes that are not equally well organized, particularly when the issue may not be a voting issue yet with the American people.

There are lots of issues where a majority, maybe even two-thirds, agree with me, and I still can't pass it in Congress because to the people who are against it, it's a voting issue or a contribution issue, and to people who are for it, it isn't.

Now, I think the gay community has come a long way just since I've been here, both in terms of the sophistication of it's arguments and the quality of its organization and its active participation in the political process, including contributing to campaigns of the people you agree with and believe in. So I think all that is to the good.

But I still say, I think the most important thing—I was just looking over the people that are going to be at this lunch that we're going to and what they do for a living. They have normal jobs in big companies that are important, and they're in a position to exercise influence over people with whom they work. The thing I think is important is to try to get more non-gay supporters of these issues who see it as civil rights issues and see it as a voting issue, an important political priority. And I think that it's going that way.

Same-Sex Marriage

Mr. Bull. In '96—I think I actually had the year wrong—you signed the Defense of Marriage Act. Do you think Americans—and, politically, that was a hard issue for everyone in Congress, as well as you. Do you think Americans will ever come to the point where they can find same-sex marriage acceptable?

The President. I don't know the answer to that. But again, I think that under the law, gay couples who have manifested a genuine commitment should have all the legal options that others do, whether it's how they leave their estates or cover their partners with health insurance on the job or such simple things as the right to visit hospital beds during family visiting hours, you know, the whole panoply of things.

And then I think that when people come to respect that, and people will put their own words to whatever the relationship is and it will—the main thing is that we recognize the integrity of commitments and the right citizens have to leave their property and take care of the health of people they love and all the things that people do.

Also, I think one of the things that may impact this debate in the future is the parallel debate that's going on in some places still over adoptions, because you see more and more gay couples adopting kids. Very often, they're children who wouldn't be taken by other people or who haven't been. And I think that's going to have an impact on people.

I've always felt that all those anti-adoption laws were wrong. I think that the present law is the right—the historical, almost common law standard in America, although it's in statute now and our country is—these decisions should be made based on what's best for the child. I think that responsible childrearing is the most important work of any society. And insofar as people see it being done by gay couples, I think that will add to a bill's support for fair treatment.

Mr. Bull. Have your own views on same-sex marriage, itself—not on civil union or domestic partnership legislation—changed since '96?

The President. My views were and are that people who have a relationship ought to be able to call it whatever they want. And insofar as it's sanctified by a religious ceremony, that's up to the churches involved. And I always thought that.

I think what happened in the Congress was that a lot of people who didn't want to be anti-gay didn't feel that they should be saying that as a matter of law, without regard to what various churches or religions or others thought, that the United States policy was that all unions that call themselves marriages are, as a matter of law, marriages. I don't think we're there yet.

But I think that what we ought to do is to get the legal rights straightened out and let time take it's course, and we'll see what happens.

Gay Support

Mr. Bull. Just two or three more questions. With your political troubles with the GOP and the House, polls showed that gays and lesbians, along with African-Americans, were among your staunchest supporters. They really rallied to your cause and thought it was very, by and large—you know, there are certainly gay Republicans who would disagree—felt that you were being treated unfairly, your private life being used against you.

How do you feel about that support that you got from——

The President. First of all, I was honored to have it. And secondly, I think that partly it came out of the same wellspring of experience that prompted so many African-Americans to stick with me. They've been there. The people who've been targeted, who've been publicly humiliated and abused, I think, identified with what was going on, because they knew, the whole world, if anybody had been paying attention, knew by then that the whole Whitewater thing was a fraud—it never amounted to anything, which has now been acknowledged—that the civil lawsuit against me was also totally unmeritorious, as even the judge said.

So they knew that basically the whole thing was just a vehicle to try to find some last, desperate way to undermine the result of two elections and what I was trying to do for the American people and the fact that I tried to be a President for people who had been left out, left behind, ignored, and kicked, as well as for the vast majority of the American people that just needed somebody to do the right things in Washington.

So I think that there were a lot of people that knew what it was like to take a bullet, and they saw it for what it was.

Religious Right

Mr. Bull. Gays and lesbians are often the target of really unrelenting attacks from the right-wing, especially religious conservatives like Falwell and Robertson. They've sometimes turned their focus on you, as well. Does that enhance your empathy for the plight that gays and lesbians sometimes experience?

The President. Yes, although I always——

Mr. Bull. I mean, has it surprised you, the——

The President. ——my empathy level was pretty high. Does it surprise me that they hated me as much as they did? A little bit. But I think there are two things. First of all, for all their railing against entitlements on behalf of poor people, a lot of those people have a sense of entitlement to cultural superiority and political power. And they don't think anybody that's not part of their crowd has a right to cultural legitimacy or political power. And before '92, I think most of them thought no Democrat would ever win again. They thought they had this little proven formula, you know, to sort of portray us as enemies of ordinary Americans—to use a phrase that Newt Gingrich used against me and my wife. I think that was part of it.

And I think the other thing is, I think that one of the reasons they disliked me especially is that they see me as an apostate because I'm a southern white male Protestant, and southern white male Protestants have been the backbone of their political and social power, because we tend to be more politically and socially conservative.

So I think those are the two things that prompted it. Maybe they just don't like me. You know that old joke about the guy that falls off the mountain? He said, "God, why me?" And He said, "Son, there's just something about you I don't like." [*Laughter*] So maybe that's it. I don't know. [*Laughter*]

Boy Scouts

Mr. Bull. Boy Scouts of America, the Supreme Court decision upholding the Scouts'

right to determine their own membership criteria and exclude gay Scouts. Members of Congress have asked you to resign your honorary position. Would you be willing to do that?

The President. Let me ask you a fact question, first. The Girl Scouts have a different policy, don't they?

Mr. Bull. Yes, they have no policy.

The President. Well, I can tell you that my present inclination is that I shouldn't do it, because I think the Scouts do a world of good and because I think they can be persuaded to change. I think the policy is wrong, and I've made it quite clear that I think their policy is wrong. And they certainly know where I stand on it. I believe they'll change, and I think we should keep working on them.

But I don't know that it wouldn't do more harm than good, especially now, at the end of my tenure, for me just to do what would be a symbolic act of resignation. I also really appreciate a lot of the good they've done, especially with inner-city kids and poor kids, and I don't think we should negate the good they've done or we try to change what's wrong.

I think they're afraid. And I think there are all these, sort of, preconceptions—that I think are totally wrong—that gay adults are more likely to abuse children than straight adults. And if you look at the evidence every year in cases of child abuse that have a sexual component, there's just no evidence to support that. But I think there's a fear factor there.

Mr. Bull. But aren't those kids that you're talking about, that are being helped by the Scouts, being taught that they can mistreat gay kids, gay kids are second class?

The President. If I thought they were doing that—you know, one of the things that bothered me about the military situation is I thought there was an affirmative, anti-gay bias in the military. And there still is in some places. But as I said, I'm convinced Secretary Cohen is making an aggressive effort to deal with that now. If I thought they were, that would have some impact on me. I don't—if that's going on, I don't know about it. It may, but nobody——

Mr. Bull. Just the policy of exclusion would imply——

The President.——nobody has ever given me information about that. I think it's much more a function of their buying into the presumption that, particularly, gay Scout leaders would be more likely to have some sort of improper influence on the kids, rather than being inherently anti-gay.

AIDS

Mr. Bull. Can I just throw in one question, because we haven't addressed AIDS?

The President. Sure. Yes, do that.

Mr. Bull. We probably should get that in; I'm sorry. Because of the advances of AIDS treatment and the decline in death rates, it's hard to maintain the sense of urgency about ending this disease. You've worked on it a lot during your two administrations. How can we maintain that sense of urgency to conquer it?

The President. The first thing I think we have to do is to keep in mind, keep the public in mind that there are 40,000 new cases every year, and that more than half of them affect children and young people under 25. That's a lot.

The second thing I would say is, I do believe there is overwhelming bipartisan consensus in the Congress and in the country to continue looking for a cure and to continue investing in that.

And thirdly, there is overwhelming bipartisan consensus to continue, I think, the very large funding levels that we've achieved in CARE. So I think we're in reasonably good shape on that.

The next big step that I think will keep a sense of urgency is to really internationalize the struggle, to recognize America's responsibility to deal with the global AIDS crisis and to understand that the relationship between AIDS at home and AIDS abroad is quite a close one, especially with borders being as open as they are now, a lot of immigrants coming here every year, and our responsibilities and the rest of the world and our hopes for the rest of the world—particularly in our outreach to Africa, to the Indian subcontinent, and increasingly to the states of the former Soviet Union, where the AIDS rates are growing very rapidly—our ability to do what we're trying to do in those areas will turn, in no small part, on our ability to work with them, to help them reverse the epidemic.

You're going to have African countries—I've had an unprecedented outreach to Africa, and we just passed this big trade bill with Africa, and we're trying to get debt relief for the poorest African countries that are being well run. But there are countries over there that last year had very high growth rates, that within 10 years

to 15 years will have more people in their sixties than in their thirties in those countries because of the AIDS epidemic. Their economies, their societies are very likely to become largely dysfunctional, along with their political systems, unless we can do something to turn the AIDS epidemic.

I think we can keep more edge on the fight against AIDS at home if we marry it more closely to the fight against AIDS around the world.

Mr. Bull. Thank you very much, Mr. President.

The President. I enjoyed the visit.

Mr. Bull. I appreciate it very much.

The President. Thanks.

NOTE: The interview began at 12:47 p.m. aboard Air Force One en route from Andrews Air Force Base, MD, to Dallas, TX, and the transcript was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on October 23. In his remarks, the President referred to Republican Presidential candidate Gov. George W. Bush of Texas; Dennis and Judy Shepard, parents of murder victim Matthew Shepard; Commander David O'Malley, Laramie, WY, Police Department, who investigated Shepard's murder; gay activist and author David Mixner; and Marty Rouse, assistant to the Secretary of Health and Human Services. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this interview.

Remarks on the Establishment of a National Drunk Driving Standard
October 23, 2000

Good morning. I really believe that everything that needs to be said about this has just been said. I want to thank Millie Webb for sharing her story and for her crusading leadership. I want to thank another person who is here today, Brenda Frazier, who came to the White House in 1998 to talk about the tragic death of her 9-year-old daughter, Ashley, by a drunk driver.

And I want to thank all the members of Mothers Against Drunk Driving for the grassroots campaign that has galvanized our Nation and changed the way we think and now, thank goodness, the way policymakers behave when it comes to this issue.

I thank you, Secretary Slater. And I thank all the Members of Congress who have worked on this. We did have strong bipartisan support. It finally was able to overcome the lobbying pressure that Millie described.

But I want to say a special word of appreciation to Representative Nita Lowey from New York, who is here to my right, and to Senator Frank Lautenberg. They have worked for more than 5 years on this legislation, and we wouldn't be here today without their leadership.

And let me say a special word of good wishes to Senator Lautenberg. He is retiring after 18 years in the Senate. And he is leaving a true legacy as a champion for the children, the families, and the economy of this Nation, and we wish him well. Thank you, Frank.

I'd also like to thank the other members of the administration who are here, who worked on this legislation, including Admiral Loy, the Commander of the Coast Guard, and others from the Department of Transportation and the Department of Defense. And I'd like to welcome the mayor of Chicago, Richard Daley, here and congratulate him on the things that Chicago has in this transportation bill—[*laughter*]—once again showing that his influence reaches beyond the city limits of the Windy City.

Let me say to all of you that, for me, this is a very good day for the United States. This .08 standard is the biggest step to toughen drunk driving laws and reduce alcohol related crashes since a national minimum drinking age was established a generation ago. It is estimated by the experts that have studied it that it will save at least 500 lives every year. How often do we get a chance to begin a good morning and a good week by saving 500 lives a year?

I appreciate what Millie said, that we sounded the call here at the White House for a .08 standard in all 50 States over 2½ years ago. It has been an uphill battle. But the victory came because there were Members of Congress in both parties who worked with a collation of health and safety organizations to do the right thing. It came because young people, parents, and communities recognized the problem and